



Kewaunee County Water Problems Need Federal Intervention Groups Ask for EPA Action to Protect Rural Drinking Water in Wisconsin

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MADISON, WI – Today, environmental protection groups formally requested federal action on groundwater contamination issues in Kewaunee County. Thirty percent of tested drinking water wells have unsafe levels of bacteria, high nitrate levels or both.

Midwest Environmental Advocates joined Clean Wisconsin, Environmental Integrity Project, Midwest Environmental Defense Center, Kewaunee CARES and the Clean Water Action Council of Northeast Wisconsin to jointly file a written Petition for Emergency Action detailing the need for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to exercise its emergency powers under the Safe Drinking Water Act and other federal pollution cleanup laws. These laws empower the EPA to step in to provide safe drinking water in an area where contamination poses serious public health threats.

"The people of Wisconsin can't keep fighting our own state government to get the help and protections they need to be sure their drinking water is safe," said Kimberlee Wright, Midwest Environmental Advocates' Executive Director. "The water pollution problem in Kewaunee County is so serious that we have to ask the federal government to do what our state government can't or won't."

Petitioners are asking the EPA to investigate the source of contamination, take action to address the source of the problem, and provide clean drinking water to residents. The EPA took similar action to help manage nitrates in the groundwater of the Lower Yakima Valley in Washington State in 2012. The petition also builds upon ongoing local efforts including the recent 20-0 Kewaunee County Board of Supervisors vote seeking to limit winter manure spreading in the areas most susceptible to groundwater pollution.

"The state of Wisconsin has not used its authority to protect the citizens of Kewaunee County and citizens in other karst regions of the state," said Dean Hoegger, President and Executive Director of the Clean Water Action Council of Northeast Wisconsin. "The EPA must step in to reverse the trend of increasing and serious drinking water contamination in light of the state's failure."

Portions of Kewaunee County are especially susceptible to groundwater pollution because they have shallow soils overlaying fractured carbonate bedrock (karst), resulting in the rapid movement of contaminants, including bacteria and nitrates. Even a single exposure to *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter jejuni*, pathogenic bacteria which have been found in some of Kewaunee County's wells, have been known to cause serious illness or death. High nitrate levels pose significant risks to children and pregnant women including blue baby syndrome, a life threatening condition that limits the blood's ability to carry oxygen to the brain.

Despite well-documented pollution, including a comprehensive task force report conducted in 2007, Kewaunee County's groundwater issues have been largely untouched by local and state officials throughout the past decade. Agriculture is not the sole cause of the contamination but is a major contributor. Intensive agricultural

practices are on the rise in Kewaunee County, which has the highest concentration of large livestock confinements of any county in the state.

Records show that the animals on Kewaunee's largest farms, combined, produce the biological waste equivalent of 900,000 humans annually, about nine times the size of the population of the City of Green Bay. Nearly 340 million gallons of liquid manure is spread annually throughout the county.

Midwest Environmental Advocates is currently representing Kewaunee County citizens in a challenge to a water discharge permit for an expansion at one of the Kewaunee County's largest CAFOs, in part to address the lack of monitoring in an area so susceptible to groundwater contamination that it is already heavily polluted.

The full petition to the EPA is available online.

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Midwest Environmental Advocates is a public interest organization that uses the power of the law to support communities fighting for environmental accountability. Learn more about the Midwest Environmental Advocates on the web at midwestadvocates.org, like MEA on [Facebook](#) or follow @MidwestAdvocate on [Twitter](#).